

2/23/17

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

I'm not a therapist; I was drafted into this job. I do things every day that no person should have to do. My name is Debra Rich and I'm the mother of a boy with severe autism. His name is Zachary Pagnani and he's 15 years old. He lives in Milford and goes to Giant Steps School. He's nonverbal and cannot take care of his basic needs on his own. He cannot be left home alone. He cannot cross the street himself. He needs a lot of support to live with us at home and go to school.

At school, my son has 7 therapists, plus a one-to-one paraprofessional. It's a very supported environment. After school until 6 pm, we have just one in-home staff (Ed Moore) who is funded through **DDS Behavioral Services (BSP)**, formerly Voluntary Services. Ed helps us with the day-to-day struggles and helps keep him safe. He also teaches us how to implement Zack's behavioral plan so that we can be successful when Ed isn't there. Ed's been with us for 4 years, and has become a beloved family friend, and a second father for Zack. He takes Zack out on his adult trike and swimming in the summer. He was there for both my son's hospitalizations, visiting and working with him every day. He comes with Zack to all his appointments and helps the doctors work with him. We'd be lost without Ed's help.

DDS Behavioral Services helped us survive two months at home with no school-based services after Zack was outplaced by the Milford district, after his behavioral issues became too much for them to handle. He was jumping off cars and counters. He was bolting from the house, running into the road. He was pulling people's hair, hitting his teachers and himself. He wouldn't sleep. He'd get violent if denied a preferred food or activity. It was awful. I had to wear what amounted to riot gear just to toilet, bath, and dress him. DDS assigned us temporary in-home support during the day from 8-2 to help fill the gap until Ed or my husband arrived. We got through this trying time until his new school program began. Zack is currently doing much better, thanks to DDS Behavioral Services. These services really saved us, and more importantly, my son.

Giant Steps School is a wonderful program. Zack enjoys shopping at Trader Joe's, field trips, cooking, helping with the school's recycling and working in the school garden. But he can't go here forever and he certainly can't live here. I worry what will happen to my son's quality of life once his school program ends at age 21, and if I'll be able to work if there is no day-program funding after graduation. If I can't work, then we'll lose our home. My husband doesn't make enough to do it alone, and we have no family to help. These are the things that keep me up at night. Not who will win the Super Bowl. Someday, perhaps in another life, I'll have the luxury of worrying about the Super Bowl.

Please support the Governor's proposal to invest \$3.8 million in the ID Partnership which will help people on the DDS residential waiting list, support developing more residential options for people with I/DD and stabilize community based supports. Please restore funding for day and employment services for all new graduates! Please restore funding to Behavioral Support Services! Please cut overtime and waste in DDS – DON'T CUT COMMUNITY SERVICES!

Thank you for your time and efforts.

Sincerely,
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